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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 NICOSIA 000434

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: PGOV PREL TU CY

SUBJECT: TURKISH CYPRIOT CENSUS DEBATE FOCUSES ON NATIVES
VERSUS "SETTLERS"

REF: A. 06 NICOSIA 643

¶B. 05 NICOSIA 1955

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Schlicher, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: "Native" Turkish Cypriots continue to outnumber their mainland Turkey-born brethren, according to a controversial census that T/C authorities conducted in 2006 but whose results they are releasing in periodic installments. The census findings also refute an oft-repeated Greek Cypriot claim that Turkish "settlers" constitute a majority of the "occupied area's" population; predictably, G/Cs are questioning their accuracy. Census takers also investigated the parentage of "TRNC citizens," a sensitive issue between Turkish and Greek Cypriots as well as among T/Cs themselves. It indicated that Turkish Cypriots with at least one parent born in Cyprus comprised nearly 52 percent of the total permanent resident population. Opinion leaders nevertheless argue that the "TRNC" increasingly looks like a Persian Gulf state, where foreign workers constitute the majority of the labor force, if not the population. Further, many rank-and-file Turkish Cypriots lament they are "losing their country" under a wave of immigration of mainland Turks, whom they blame for rising violent crime. No change in "TRNC" migration policy is expected soon, however. South of the Buffer Zone, Greek Cypriot authorities have refused to comment on the "TRNC" census, and most G/C media dismissed it out of hand. END SUMMARY.

RELEASING DATA "IN THE MODE OF A BRAZILIAN SOAP OPERA"

¶2. (SBU) Turkish Cypriot authorities conducted a general census in April 2006, enforcing a strict daylight curfew to enable the "State Planning Organization (DPO)" to conduct the count (Ref A). Approximately 6,000 staff -- mainly public servants and college students -- fanned out across the "TRNC" to register all those physically present in northern Cyprus. Even tourists were restricted to their hotels so they could be included. In addition to seeking a raw count, DPO census takers carried a list of 61 questions (38 of them personal/demographic, 14 housing-related, and nine related to their "citizenship"/residency status). Although "Prime Minister" Ferdi Soyer was able to announce the preliminary overall population numbers a few days after the census, an analysis of the data has taken longer than the six months initially expected. In February 2007 and again in April, however, "TRNC" authorities released highly-publicized tranches of information.

¶3. (C) In announcing the February release, "PM" Soyer explained census modalities and the "government's" deliberate approach in making public the findings. "We wanted zero

mistakes in the final results and worked very carefully," he contended, attempting to explain the delays. Subsequently, DPO "Undersecretary" Isilay Yilmaz revealed that, for the first time, the "TRNC" had conducted a census without relying heavily on Turkey. "The 'TRNC' needed to enter the information technology age," Yilmaz argued. She therefore had "forced" the Turkish Cypriot bureaucracy to take on the task, hoping the information gathered would spawn greater automation within the "TRNC government," and that other "agencies" and "ministries" might utilize the data. Further, its results would aid authorities in parcelling out resources to local "governments" and assist in reform efforts.

WHAT THE DATA SHOW

¶4. (C) The census counted both the "de facto" population -- everyone present within the "TRNC" on census day -- and "de jure" population -- those resident for one year or more. The de facto count tallied 265,100 individuals, 143,843 males and 121,257 females, while the de jure population was 256,644, 138,568 males and 118,076 females. In his public comments, Soyer revealed a 32.2 percent increase in the de facto population and a 36 percent increase in the de jure since the last census taken (1996). Using projections from the 1996 census, experts earlier had anticipated the de facto tally would reach only 220,000, he added. Yilmaz was not surprised by the higher-than-expected result. Anecdotal evidence -- "just looking around," she laughed -- suggested the population of the north had risen quickly in recent years. She admitted some surprise at one finding, however, which showed that over 4,000 T/C emigrants had returned, most since ¶2002. They likely were drawn by the prospect of a Cyprus

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settlement or the island's then-imminent EU entry.

¶5. (SBU) The census did not include the approximately 30,000 Turkish troops housed in bases in northern Cyprus. Officers living off-base and their dependents were added to the de facto number, however, and to the de jure number if their time "in-country" exceeded one year. The census showed over half the population of the north held "TRNC citizenship." About 47 percent carried passports of other countries, but no information was given on what percentage held Republic of Cyprus passports.

¶6. (U) The 2006 population breakdown:

Citizenship, de facto, (as percentage)

"TRNC" citizens, 133,937, 50.5 pct.
"TRNC" & other (dual), 42,795, 16.2 pct.
 "TRNC"-Turkey, 33,870, 12.8 pct.
 "TRNC"-UK, 4,185, 1.6 pct.
 "TRNC"-other, 4,740, 1.8 pct.
Turkey, 77,731, 29.3 pct.
United Kingdom, 4,458, 1.7 pct.
Bulgaria, 831, 0.3 pct.
Iran, 775, 0.3 pct.
Moldova, 485, 0.2 pct.
Pakistan, 490, 0.2 pct.
Germany, 343, 0.1 pct.
Other, 3,255, 1.2 pct.

Citizenship, de jure, (as percentage)

"TRNC" citizens, 135,106, 52.6 pct.
"TRNC" & other (dual), 42,925, 16.7 pct.
 "TRNC"-Turkey, 34,370, 13.4 pct.
 "TRNC"-UK, 3,854, 1.5 pct.
 "TRNC"-other, 4,740, 1.8 pct.
Turkey, 70,525, 27.5 pct.
United Kingdom, 2,729, 1.1 pct.
Bulgaria, 797, 0.3 pct.

Iran, 759, 0.3 pct.
Moldova, 354, 0.1 pct.
Pakistan, 475, 0.2 pct.
Germany, 181, 0.1 pct.
Other, 2,793, 1.1 pct.

¶7. (C) Mete Hatay, a researcher and project leader at the Cyprus Center of the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), told us May 8 that the census had probably undercounted the population due to "poor preparation" and a small boycott campaign launched by the anti-establishment newspaper "Afrika." Hatay put the de jure population at approximately 280,000, while "TRNC citizens" numbered closer to 188,000 (rather than the census's 178,031).

A RISING TIDE OF IMMIGRANTS?

¶8. (C) "DPO U/S" Yilmaz expounded on perhaps the most sensitive aspect of northern Cyprus demographics: the "immigrant" (the preferred terminology in the north) or "settler" (the south's choice) count. Pre-1979 arrivals were mainly Turkish Cypriots relocating from government-controlled areas in southern Cyprus; they numbered approximately 32,000.

Conversely, a majority of post-1979 arrivals -- approximately 95,000 out of 140,000 total -- hailed from mainland Turkey. The "TRNC" census did not distinguish between "legal" and "illegal" immigrants, Yilmaz added. While in opposition, the "governing" Republican Turkish Party (CTP) had warned of the potential "extinction" of Turkish Cypriots in the face of massive Turkish immigration. Immigration from Anatolia had reached new heights in recent years, she asserted, and showed little sign of abating anytime soon.

Year, Immigrants from Turkey

to April 2006, 5,318
2005, 18,408
2004, 13,448
2003, 7,993
2002, 4,110
2001, 2,976
2000, 3,097
1999-1995, 10,487
1994-1990, 7,101
1989-1985, 4,242

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1984-1980, 1,833
1979 & before, 13,797

Turks' Reason for Immigration, Number

Work, 29,318
Appointment/Duty, 4,772
Education, 18,104
Marriage, 6,608
Dependence on Household Members, 29,221
Return to "TRNC", 927
Other, 5,251
Unknown, 776

¶9. (SBU) Most of the non-"TRNC citizen" population were guest workers and students. One prominent Turkish Cypriot pollster claimed that the "TRNC" had begun to resemble "a (Persian) Gulf state where foreign workers constitute most of the labor force." PRIO's Hatay estimated Turkish student population at 30,000.

APPLYING SOME POSITIVE SPIN

¶10. (SBU) Confronted daily by Greek Cypriot allegations that Turkish Cypriots had become a minority in the north, "TRNC" leaders delighted in the census's findings and lauded its accuracy, though the lengthy delaying in parceling out the results bred accusations that the authorities were "massaging" the numbers to make political points. Further, they defended "government naturalization" practices, at least those of recent years. "Those immigrants who came to the island 30 years ago and had children who have since then had their own children can be thought of as nothing other than citizens of the 'TRNC,'" Soyer argued. "President" Mehmet Ali Talat claimed that, since the CTP came to power, "citizenship" was granted according to internationally recognized norms (nonetheless, contacts claim the CTP is considering a change in the "naturalization" law to extend the necessary length of residence before "citizenship" can be granted.) Neither Talat nor Soyer chose to comment on allegations that "governments" preceding the CTP's padded the citizenship roles for electoral reasons.

YOUR CITIZENS AREN'T NECESSARILY OURS

¶11. (SBU) Irrespective of whether the census was accurate or not, its findings will not resolve a fundamental point of contention between Greek and Turkish Cypriots (and often between T/Cs themselves): what makes a Turkish Cypriot. Nevertheless, it does provide information on birthplace and parentage, two determinative factors in "citizenship." The census showed that 145,000 "TRNC citizens" were born in Cyprus, 81 percent of the "citizen" population and 57 percent of the total de jure. Regarding parentage -- a particularly sensitive issue since many Greek Cypriots argue that neither Turkish "colonizers" nor their progeny can be legalized -- 120,000 "TRNC citizens" had both parents born in Cyprus (67 percent of the citizens population and 47 percent of the de jure). Some 12,600 had one parent born in Cyprus. Twenty-four percent of "TRNC" citizens, nearly 43,000 total, had both parents born in Turkey,

¶12. (SBU) The Republic of Cyprus (ROC) government had no official comment on the "TRNC's" census and the Greek Cypriot media generally has treated it as non-serious. "Phileleftheros," the largest-circulation G/C newspaper, merely republished an article from the anti-establishment T/C daily "Afrika" which alleged the "TRNC" had been "trying everything over the past year to make the number of people from Turkey appear smaller, by adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing." "Afrika" cited a recent Turkish Ministry of Labor and Social Security report that claimed there were 35,000 more Turks in Cyprus than the "TRNC" census revealed. "After all this, now do you understand why it took them a year to announce the census results?" "Afrika" quipped. Independent G/C political analyst Christoforos Christoforou, who has extensively researched demographic and electoral trends on both sides of the island, also voiced skepticism with the Turkish Cypriot data. Of greatest concern was the census's reliance on voluntary self-identification, with no cross-checking of identity or "citizenship" documentation.

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¶13. The question of "settler status" is a contentious issue that lies close to the heart of the Cyprus problem. Under the relevant provisions of the Republic of Cyprus's 1967 citizenship law, amended in 2002, children with even a single Cypriot parent are automatically entitled to RoC citizenship (Ref B). The government reserved for itself a review mechanism, however, requiring the Council of Ministers to approve all applications for citizenship from children of mixed Turkish Cypriot/mainland Turkish parentage. The expressed goal of this procedure was to identify those children with a "settler" parent, so that they might be denied citizenship on the grounds that the children of

settlers were themselves "products of a crime." Christoforos argued that, in the end, the "TRNC's" census was an exercise in vain, since the government would never except its "citizen" counts. Both sides would trumpet its results for political purposes, however.

COMMENT

¶14. (C) The CTP-led "government" tackled the census project with vigor and, in its opinion, showed the world it could conduct the work of a recognized "government." Now comes the hard part: turning findings into immigration policy. Voicing a concern shared by many Turkish Cypriots, especially from the pro-solution camp, United Cyprus Party leader Izzet Izcan complained to us that he was "losing his country" to Turkish immigrants. As long as a settlement was delayed, he continued, more Turks would flood into northern Cyprus. Yilmaz pointed to pull factors, explaining that the expanding T/C economy required labor, especially in construction. Self-identified "natives" saw a negative flip-side to the migrant wave, however, and attributed rising crime to the newcomers. Regardless, we expect no immigration overhaul, no mass deportations, anytime soon. Such a move undoubtedly would anger T/C nationalists and their Turkish Forces allies on the island, a battle Talat and Soyer would rather not fight at this moment.

¶16. (C) Given the Greek Cypriots' dismissive response, the census also won't help to quell discord over the demographic elements of a possible Cyprus solution. In the past, G/Cs have demanded a census be included on the agenda of UN-sponsored technical talks. Turkish Cypriot authorities now will argue that this request is moot, creating one more source of friction between the communities.

SCHLICHER